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ABSTRACT

This original comparative study explores two central questions in the study of first language acquisition: What is the relative impact of structural and functional determinants? What is universal versus language-specific during development? The study addresses these questions in three domains of child language: reference to entities, the representation of space, and uses of temporal-aspectual markings. It provides a review of different theoretical approaches to language acquisition and a wide range of developmental research, as well as examining all three domains in English, French, German, and Chinese narrative. Findings concern the rhythm of acquisition, the interplay among different factors (syntactic, semantic, pragmatics) determining children's uses, and universal versus variable aspects of acquisition. Conclusions stress the importance of relating sentence and discourse determinants of acquisition in a cross-linguistic perspective. Picture sequences used as stimuli are appended. (Contains approximately 660 references.) (Author/SM)

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